

# CITIZENS' Report



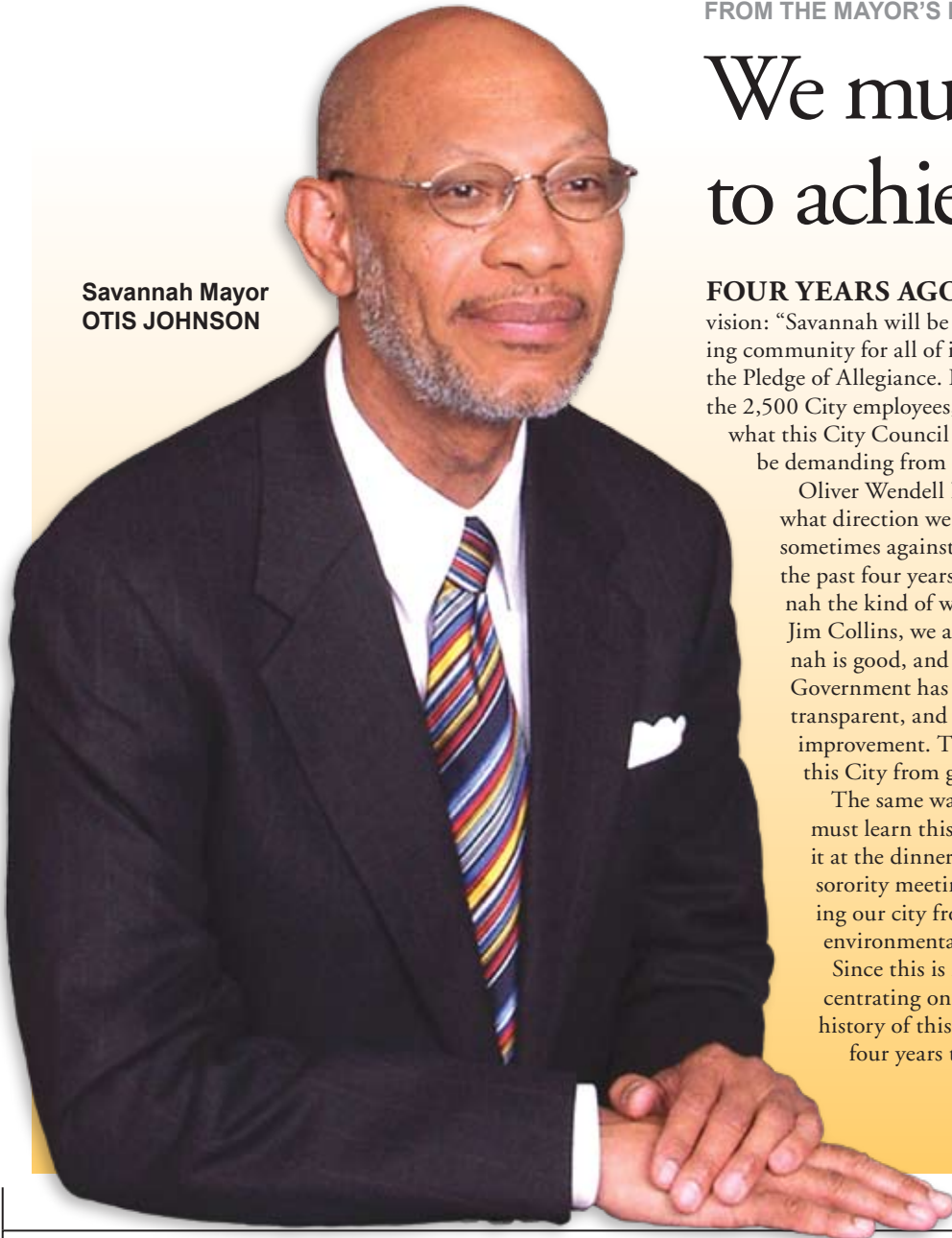
MARCH 2008

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FROM THE MAYOR'S DESK

## We must work together to achieve our Vision

Savannah Mayor  
OTIS JOHNSON



**FOUR YEARS AGO** your City Council made a commitment to the following vision: "Savannah will be a safe, environmentally healthy, and economically thriving community for all of its citizens." I've said that so often that I can recite it like the Pledge of Allegiance. I would hope that the citizens of Savannah, and especially the 2,500 City employees, would learn that vision statement, too, because that is what this City Council is committed to, and that is what you as citizens should be demanding from us.

Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, "Greatness is not where we stand but in what direction we are moving. We must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it, but sail we must and not drift nor lie at anchor." For the past four years we have been moving toward that vision to make Savannah the kind of world-class city we all deserve. To borrow from the author Jim Collins, we are looking to move this City from Good to Great. Savannah is good, and we are getting better on our way to being great. Your City Government has made it its mission to become more responsive, to be more transparent, and to be more accountable. This is considered continuous improvement. That is why we are committed to sailing forward to take this City from good to great.

The same way we learn to say the Pledge of Allegiance, our citizens must learn this community's Vision Statement, and be able to discuss it at the dinner table, at our church meetings, and at our fraternity and sorority meetings. Wherever we go, we should be talking about moving our city from good to great, so we will all be safe, so we will all be environmentally healthy, and so we all will be economically thriving.

Since this is my last term in office, I want to spend my time concentrating on the things that can make a difference in the long-term history of this City. Therefore, I have set a personal agenda for the next four years that focuses on five initiatives.

Please see **INITIATIVES**, page 2

### CITY REPORT CARD

We look back at 2007, and ahead to 2008, on key priorities adopted by your City Council | **Page 4**

### WATCH CITY SPAN

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## Earth Day festivities planned

Savannah will celebrate its 12th annual Earth Day on April 19 at Forsyth Park, and this year's events promise to be bigger and better than ever.

The schedule of events is as follows:

**8-11 a.m.:** RecycleRama — Recycle car batteries, gallons of paint, tires, plastic, aluminum and more

**9 a.m.:** Earth Day 5K Run: \$20 pre-registration/\$25 day of

**11 a.m.-3 p.m.:** Earth Day Festival  
• Live Oak Exhibition Alley with information and giveaways to make your household more energy and water efficient.

• Green Cuisine — over 15 food vendors preparing tasty delights

using local produce.

- Frees classes on Kitchen Composting, Rain Barrel assembly, and Native Landscaping
- Live Reptile and Bird Exhibit
- Coast Guard Helicopter

• Music and Entertainment featuring the Cajun band Feufollet from Louisiana

**11:30 a.m.:** Free class: Kitchen composting basics

**1 p.m.:** Rain barrel workshop

**3 p.m.:** Savannah Wheelie Earth Day Bike Ride: Bring your bike to Forsyth, and ride with the Mayor and other bicycle lovers on a tour through the Historic District.

To learn more about 2008 Earth Day events, visit [www.savannahga.gov](http://www.savannahga.gov).

## Initiative

From the cover

### Healthy Savannah 2012

This program launched in 2007 aims to improve the overall health of our community within five years. Savannahians are suffering from many preventable diseases. In order to become a healthier community, everyone must be engaged. We have received and must continue to receive support from the private sector in this initiative. All companies must play a role in increasing the health of their employees. Last year I agreed to a Health Challenge from the Mayor of Albany. Twenty families from each city participated in a 12-week challenge that ended in February. The Challenge has changed lives in Savannah. Corey Phillips lost 76 pounds and improved his muscle strength by 70 percent. Janet Junco, a mother of three, quit smoking during the challenge and improved all health indicators. These citizens should serve as examples for the rest of Savannah that it is never too late to make a change.

### Social services

There is a saying that a caring and just community provides for its people from the womb to the tomb. I will be working with both the public and private sector to ensure that any child who needs supports and services

get them, and any person getting ready to take his last breath and move to the hereafter receives the support he or she deserves. This is what a just and caring community does for its citizens, and I am committed to making that happen.

### Green Savannah

The City will do what ever it can to make Savannah a more environmentally healthy community. Your City Government will transform its fleets from gas to alternative fuels, replace our standard bulbs with energy-efficient ones, and design buildings with the latest environmentally sensitive construction techniques. The City of Savannah needs to be an example. It's one thing to say what people ought to do, and it's another to do it.

### Affordable housing

We must work to register all rental property in town. If your rental property is up to code, you should not worry about having it registered. I believe many of the people afraid of registration are the slumlords who don't want to be identified. Well, we are going to identify you because our people deserve a decent, healthy place to stay. We are moving forward with the transformation of Strathmore Estates on the eastside, supporting the Sustainable Fellwood initiative on the westside, and working together with the Housing Authority to begin more

There is a saying that a caring and just community provides for its people from the womb to the tomb.

projects of this nature in the future. Just look at Ashley Midtown in the Benjamin Van Clark neighborhood. It's a prime example of taking down something that was very negative and replacing it with something very positive and meaningful.

### Youth development

I grew up in this city, I love this city, and I am deeply troubled by the conduct of our youth in the schools and on the streets of this city. We have to engage parents, schools, religious, and civic organizations in doing a better job of rearing our children. We have to re-energize and redirect the work of the Youth Futures Authority as the leader of collaborative efforts needed to improve outcomes for children and youth in our community. We have to hold public and private agencies that receive funds to do youth development work accountable for producing results. We must continue reaching out to the faith community and

develop faith-based initiatives to help our young people and their families. This struggle is not just about a social issue-this is also a moral struggle.

We must come together as a community to face this challenge. On Saturday, March 29, 2008, we will hold a youth summit at 10 a.m. at the Coastal Georgia Center to allow young people to discuss their issues and propose solutions. On April 10, we will have a Youth Development Town Hall meeting at 5 p.m. at the Civic Center. I invite everyone to attend and help decide how we can move forward in a collaborative effort, bringing together the public and private sectors, to get control over our challenge of positive youth development.

As some of you know, I recently had a procedure to replace defective wires going into my heart from a difibulator doctors implanted in my chest. The defective wires could have given me a fatal shock. This experience, with my heart since 2006, is one of the reasons I have become so focused and passionate about these issues. I don't know from day to day how much time I have left, and I am not wasting any of it. I have made a commitment to this city, and with the help of God I will serve the four years of my final term moving Savannah from good to great and become one of the best mayors Savannah has ever had. I invite all of you to join me on this journey.

# A major waste disposal change

### What changes can I expect?

Starting this summer, yard waste will have to be separated from other household trash. Leaves can be placed in bags, and branches can be stacked next to the trash cart. The yard clippings will be recycled into mulch. The diversion is necessary to further reduce landfill volume. Look for more information on this in coming months.

### What about recycling?

The City is finalizing a contract with a private recycler who will build, own and operate a facility to receive residential recyclables in Savannah. Under a system called "single stream recycling," each City household would receive a second trash cart, into which all recyclables will be placed. Savannah Sanitation workers will collect those recyclables curbside, and haul them to the private facility. Plans are to start the system in January 2009.

### What about the Resource Recovery Facility?

Owned and operated by the private Veolia, the plant will discontinue operations and likely be secured and possibly demolished. The roughly four dozen employees may be transferred to other Veolia facilities. City resources will be available to transition other Resource Recovery employees into new employment.



Trash is loaded into the Resource Recovery Facility. The facility, which incinerates solid waste, will be discontinued this summer.



A giant claw hauls trash from a football field-sized indoor garbage pit into the incinerator at the facility off East President Street.

## City to end Resource Recovery, focus on curbside recycling

Trash: Certainly not exciting, but undeniably important.

Timely collection and disposal of our City's solid waste is one of the basic services of your government. It's a function fraught with logistical and environmental challenges, but one absolutely necessary for a functioning community.

In February, the City Council made a landmark decision that will forever change the way Savannah handles trash.

Beginning this summer, the City will stop sending its solid waste to the Resource Recovery Facility, which for more than 25 years has been incinerating trash and turning it into steam.

The process allows the City to bury mostly ash instead of garbage at the landfill, saving precious space.

Up until two years ago, the arrangement worked.

Steam produced during incineration was sold to nearby industry off East President Street, which used it in the production of pigment.

But when industry no longer needed steam, burning trash suddenly became too expensive to continue unchanged.

The City was left with two options.

Pay Veolia, the company that runs the facility, \$18.1 million to add power-producing turbines to the Resource Recovery Facility — energy that could then be sold to offset costs.

Or stop burning trash.

City Council decided to opt out of the Resource Recovery Contract, deciding that the extra costs weren't worth the benefits.

To help extend the landfill's life, the City will stop accepting privately hauled commercial waste, forcing

those companies to dump at private sites. A group of business owners led by the Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce has been asking for this very arrangement for more than a year.

"This was a difficult decision, but these are uncertain economic times and we need the financial flexibility to accomplish our priorities, including increased public safety, more affordable housing, poverty reduction and economic development," Mayor Otis Johnson said.

Even with the change, officials estimate that the 980-acre landfill site should last another 54 years if fully permitted. City Manager Michael Brown is optimistic that new trash compaction technology will extend that life even further.

"Good planning allowed us to have alternatives, but unfortunately when it comes to waste disposal none of the options is ever ideal," Brown said. "We're confident that this decision, paired with our soon to be unveiled curbside recycling program, is in the best interest for the citizens of Savannah."



# 2007: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

## Looking back, looking ahead on five key City Council priorities

### Economic Development

#### Looking back

In 2007 the City trained more than 600 residents on how to develop business plans and other skills necessary to start their own companies. About \$435,000 in loans were awarded to create new African American-owned businesses — the most ever in Savannah.

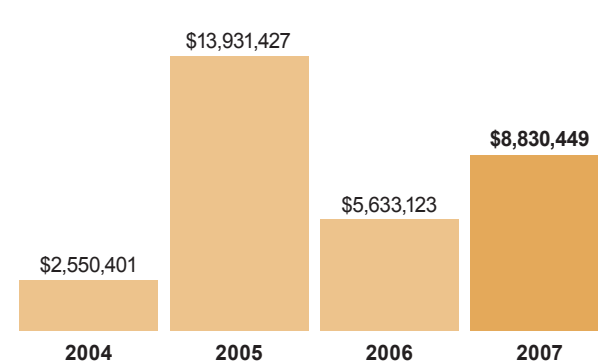
The City's Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprise Program focused on increasing the capacity of existing local businesses through training and referrals. More than \$8.8 million in City contracts were awarded to African American-owned businesses in 2007 — a 57 percent increase over 2006.

The Step-Up Poverty Reduction Collaborative enrolled 156 residents in job skill centers in 2007, and helped 2,574 residents claim \$2.6 million in refunds through free tax preparation sites.

#### Looking ahead

In 2008, the City's MWBE office will develop a comprehensive database of local minority-owned businesses to help increase minority participation in City contracts. More aggressive incentives will be set to further encourage minority participation in City contracts.

The City, in collaboration with Step-Up, has partnered with the nonprofit Accion, which provides small, low-interest loans to help residents with basic needs. Accion plans to make 100 loans in 2008 totaling \$700,000.



#### City contract awards

Last year, the city awarded 63 percent more African-American Business Enterprise contracts than in 2006.

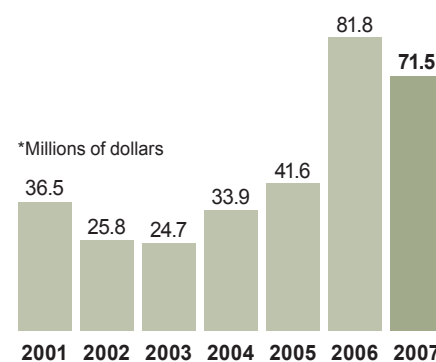
### Capital Projects

#### Looking back

In 2007, the City finished major renovations of the W.W. Law Center on Savannah's eastside, and the Lady Bamford Early Childhood Development Center on the westside. Major drainage projects were finished on the Wilshire Canal and in Jackson Woods. Construction wrapped up on a \$20 million westside wastewater treatment plant, and began on a curb cut initiative to improve accessibility at almost 1,500 corners downtown.

#### Looking ahead

In 2008, work is expected to finish on the massive Ellis Square project, which is adding an underground parking garage and restoring one of Savannah's original squares. Work will also begin on the Children's Museum at Battlefield Park, and finish on the Alice and Tattnall drainage project downtown.



#### Capital improvements

There has been a 200 percent increase in project funding since 2003.

### Public Safety

#### Looking back

In 2007 the City saw a continuation of the historically low Part I crime numbers reached in 2006, when serious crime dropped below 10,000 for the first time in 30 years. While Part I crime increased slightly — by 0.7 percent — the numbers were still 23 percent below the 2001 total and 10 percent below the 2004 total.

This occurred without the dramatic overtime Metro police incurred in 2006, when 16 Sheriff's deputies were brought in to supplement the force. Metro Police Chief Michael Berkow accomplished this by using new technology, by forming new partnerships, and by deploying a strategy that focused on more efficient use of manpower.

This strategy led to more criminals being caught. Between 2006 and 2007, Part I arrests rose 29 percent.

#### Looking ahead

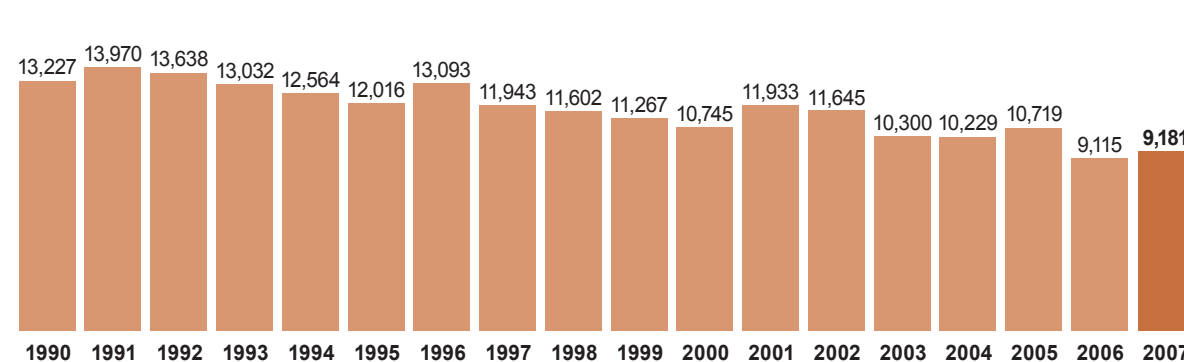
In 2008, Metro Police will focus on driving down violent crime, which rose by 109 incidents in the City in 2007. While still below levels of five years ago, the numbers are unacceptable, particularly with robberies, which increased 8 percent in Savannah last year. Much can be attributed to young offenders: Between 2006 and

2007, the median age of robbery arrestees dropped from 21 years old to 20.

To combat this problem, Mayor Otis Johnson will hold a Youth Development Town Hall Meeting in April. The event's goal will be to implement an action plan that will focus on establishing a juvenile offender case management workgroup, creating a mechanism to increase parental responsibility, and forming a plan to engage community and faith-based groups to participate in the solution.

In 2008, Police will also focus on fully staffing positions; on expanded investigations through the newly formed Savannah Area Regional Intelligence Center (SARIC), an intelligence gathering and analysis unit that involves more than two dozen local, state and federal law enforcement agencies; and on new technology such as mobile data terminal for cruisers, and new surveillance cameras at locations throughout the City.

Improvements to the 911 Communications Center — including an increase in staff, a change in common language, a transition to digital radios, and the creation of an auto attendant to reroute administrative calls — is already greatly improving Police dispatch capabilities, allowing officers to respond to incidents quicker.



#### Part I crime since 1990

Part I crimes in Savannah show a steady drop since 1990. These crimes include homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft.

### Affordable Housing

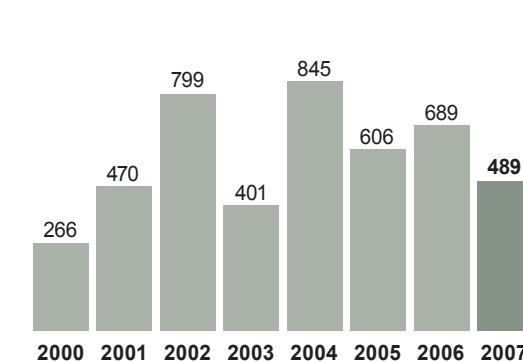
#### Looking back

In 2007, the City built 57 infill houses, added 40 affordable rental units, made 292 homeowner improvements for those in need, and helped 100 residents purchase their first homes.

#### Looking ahead

In 2008 the City, in partnership with the nonprofit CHSA Development Inc., will begin the process of redeveloping the 44-acre, 380-unit Strathmore Estates on Savannah's eastside. Plans are to redevelop the site into high-quality mixed-use, mixed-income affordable housing. CHSA purchased the property with assistance from the City in 2007.

On Savannah's westside, the City is partnering with the Housing Authority of Savannah and Melaver Inc. to redevelop the former Fellwood Homes public housing community into the mixed-income Sustainable Fellwood. The development will include 220 public and affordable housing units, 100 senior housing units, 10 single-family homes, organic community gardens, and large parks. It will be developed using cutting edge green building techniques.



#### Housing production

Includes infill houses built, rental units added, homebuyer loans secured and home repairs.

### Blight Eradication

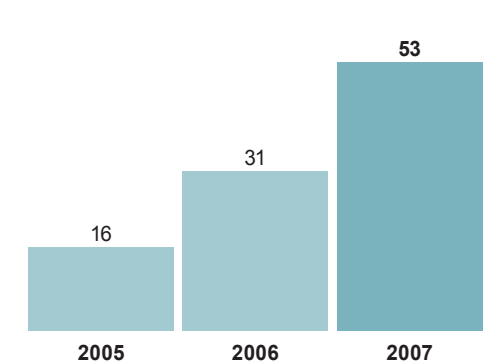
#### Looking back

In 2007, the Property Maintenance Department tore down about one dilapidated structure a week, and cleared more than 1,000 overgrown lots. The department successfully completed its first 100 Worst Properties List, which targets the worst of the worst, and quickly moved on to its second 100 Worst List.

#### Looking ahead

In 2008, the City will work to change laws to allow for the inspection of rental properties, and to take quicker action against blighted properties.

The City has also begun monthly Blight Boot Camps, which train citizens to be partners in the war on blight, and neighborhood blitzes, which focuses all City inspectors on a single neighborhood for a single day. The effort, in conjunction with the intensive operation: Clean Sweep, is making real change in conditions throughout the City one neighborhood at a time.



#### Buildings demolished

There was a 70.9 percent increase in dilapidated structures razed in 2007.



# A more intelligent way to fight crime



One of the servers that drive SARIC's intelligence-gathering operations

Left: Inside Savannah Area Regional Intelligence Headquarters

## New Metro Police center crunches data, analyzes trends to catch the bad guys

Tucked deep within Savannah-Chatham Metro Police headquarters — past the front desk guards, through two keypad-secured doors, and just beyond an entrance locked with fingerprint-scanning technology — lies the new central nervous system of law enforcement intelligence gathering.

Live feeds from surveillance cameras positioned above streets across Savannah display on a giant flatscreen television here. On another screen scrolls a running list of calls being dispatched from the Communications Center. An analyst sifts through police reports while glancing at a crime map displayed on his computer monitor.

It's called the Savannah Area Regional Intelligence Center, or SARIC, and it's a new addition to Metro conceived by Chief Michael Berkow.

Berkow created it last fall in an attempt to make better use of the intelligence his officers gathered, the data his analysts compiled, and the partnerships he was forming with law enforcement throughout the region.

His solution was to house Metro's Intelligence, Analysis and Planning units under one roof, and place the information they gathered on an easy-to-use, password-protected Web site accessible to agencies throughout the Coastal Empire.

"SARIC allows us to be so much smarter about fighting crime," Berkow said. "We are identifying trends faster, and pushing information out in a much more timely and targeted manner."

Last week, a SARIC analyst was sifting through crime data and discovered similarities among 10 recent burglaries on Savannah's eastside. A suspect description and incident map was circulated to patrol officers via new mobile data terminals recently added to patrol cars. Through the weekend, officers positioned themselves in areas the burglars were likely to hit. When the two young men, each about 5-foot-6 inches tall and partial to swiping laptops and gaming systems, are caught, a rash of crimes will have ended in one part of town.

"With SARIC, we are able to see the patterns and connect the dots," said SARIC Analysis and Planning Coordinator Brian Renner.

They are also able to do a lot more sharing. Through the SARIC Web site, officers can instantly see which prisoners have been released from prison, who is wanted on outstanding warrants, which roads are closed, what major events are happening around town and what new drugs are hitting the streets (the latest is meth-laced ecstasy).

So can officers from agencies as diverse as Pooler Police and the FBI, and as far away as Florida and South Carolina. They can instantly let Savannah police know about similar crimes happening in their jurisdictions.

"What ever is useful makes its way onto this site," Renner said. "It's real-time information. There is no delay."

As he spoke, up popped information about a maroon Ford Explorer believed to be driven by a pair of suspects in another Savannah burglary.

"Tonight, officers from across the City will be stopping maroon Explorers," Renner said. "And if you check back in a few days, you'll see that these guys have been caught."

## Youth Development Town Hall Meeting planned for April 10

Mayor Otis Johnson will hold a citywide Youth Summit and then a Youth Development Town Hall Meeting in coming weeks to help combat an alarming trend.

The Summit will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, March 29, at the Coastal Georgia Center on Fahm Street. Its purpose is to allow young people to discuss issues and propose solutions surrounding youth crime. The Youth Development Town Hall Meeting will be held at 5 p.m. April 10 at the Civic Center. Its goal will be to implement an action plan among government, judicial, education and nonprofit agencies throughout the region in response to the growing problem of young offenders.

Between 2006 and 2007, the median age of robbery arrestees dropped from 21 to 20 in the Metro jurisdiction, while the number of robberies committed by teens more than doubled.

"We are going to continue throwing out these ideas, working on these interventions, and we know that we are getting good returns on some of them, though there is no magic bullet," Johnson said. "We're going to continue having these meetings and discussions, just like Johnny Appleseed."



City of Savannah Landscape Specialist Marian Hollaway plants garden mums around the Forsyth Park Fountain.

# Savannah in spring: Enter the ballroom

This is our time to shine. But it's hard work and preparation that make our parks pop.

It was with equal parts anticipation and dread that City of Savannah Park Services Administrator Jim Parker prepared for the big St. Patrick's Day weekend.

Anticipation because St. Patrick's is Savannah's biggest stage: "A public park should be for the public, and we always want as many people as possible to enjoy them," Parker said.

Dread knowing that the crush of people would soon lay waste to much of Parker's hard work: "It's not love-hate, but more of a symbiotic relationship. The park will get damaged, but our job is to bring it back."

In the days leading up to St. Patrick's, Parker's team of landscape specialists was busy: annuals were being planted, beds were being mulched, and the famed green dye was being released into the City's elegant fountains.

Springtime is Savannah's time to shine,

but Parker's job is to ensure that the City's parks and squares bloom year-round. It's a tricky game, equal parts art and science.

His landscape specialists start with the hardscape: the walkways, fountains and sidewalks that form the backbone of any park.

Then they consider the trees: They frame, and shade, and provide the room in which the plants reside.

Then plant decisions are made: Big swaths of color make impact, but not at the expense of a colorless fall and winter. In Forsyth, it's all about timed blooms.

"Someone else wrote this, but it's like entering a ballroom when you walk into our squares," Parker said. "The tree canopy provides the superstructure, the trunks the walls, and then there is the leaf texture, the shape and the color. It's like a three-dimensional coloring book."

At Forsyth Park's center the week before



An explosion of azaleas offer drama throughout our parks.

St. Patrick's, elegant white garden mums shared space with patches of shamrock to frame the iconic fountain. Pink and white azaleas were just beginning to burst, while a lonely Chinese snowball viburnum was throwing bouquets of puffy white and a trio of red buds were popping strings of lavender.

All of this takes planning.

Winter rye is seeded in October amongst the St. Augustine to ensure green grass year-round. Tulips are planted during a narrow window in December to ensure a

spring arrival. Lantana cut back in the fall begins to fill in at the end of March, adding consistent blooms until the first frost.

In the summer come the roses. By then, sprindly stalks will have risen from the center of the agapanthas, revealing beautiful clusters of blue. By June, beds of Mexican heather will be ribboned with purple buttons, set neatly next to Russian sage and the electric green of sweet potato vines.

Few plants fail in Savannah's parks, mostly because of a rigorous soil management schedule: the earth is tested, aerated, fertilized, and sprayed with a liquid application of beneficial bacteria and fungi.

When Parker makes changes, he likes to think through how those changes might affect the landscape 20 years into the future. Savannah's parks and squares are the jewels in her crown, after all — treasured heirlooms for all of her citizens to inherit.

"These are publicly held properties, and it is our duty to maintain it not just for the current population, but for generations to come," Parker said. "I want to see a park that is constantly growing. It should always be in a state of flux."



## Your city representatives



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Mayor Otis Johnson and Georgia Historical Society President W. Todd Groce dedicate the historic marker March 3 remembering a massive 1859 slave sale in West Savannah.

# Savannah remembers a painful episode in history

## City officials take steps to acknowledge government's role in institution of slavery

When Gen. James Oglethorpe landed on Yamacraw Bluff in 1733, he brought with him a utopian vision of America's first planned city. Savannah was to be a beautiful place organized around tidy public spaces, an orderly street grid and blissfully free of slavery.

But the painful truth is that almost from the beginning, Savannah used slave labor to create that vision. On loan from South Carolina, they laid Savannah's famously ordered streets and built the City's first houses. Within 17 years of the Georgia Colony's founding, Oglethorpe's slave-free experiment officially ended when involuntary servitude was made legal.

From the start, Savannah's City Government was complicit in this trade - buying and selling slaves to work on public projects, taxing slave owners to generate revenue, and enacting ordinances designed to control both slaves and free persons of color.

Last year, the Savannah City Council faced this truth when it passed a resolution officially acknowledging the government's participation in slavery.

"Although this City Council cannot erase these inhumane injustices, this resolution provides for the record an acknowledgement of a dark chapter in the history of Savannah and a call to promote healing and reconciliation for all of our citizens as we move forward in creating a better community," the resolution read.

### ON THE WEB

To read "Slavery in Savannah: Intersections with Local Government," visit [www.savannahga.gov](http://www.savannahga.gov).

Last month, the City followed up with a new online feature that documents in detail Savannah's involvement with slavery. Called "Slavery in Savannah: Intersections with Local Government," the project posts documents that show the City's ownership and use of slaves for public works, and the laws it passed in support of the institution.

The Ordinances were stark: Slaves and free persons of color were banned from gathering "for purposes of dancing or other merriment." They were not allowed to receive an education. They had to wear special badges at all times, or risk 39 lashes. If they were caught attending a parade or procession, the City Marshal was allowed to inflict "moderate chastisement."

On March 3, the City dedicated a new historic marker in West Savannah that remembers "the weeping time" — one of the largest slave sales in American history, which took place in 1859 in a horse race track near Augusta Avenue. The auction of 436 slaves from a single plantation broke apart families and generations of friends — an act that pushed the country closer to Civil War.

The historic marker was placed in a new manicured park, complete with benches, walkways and ornamental fencing on the site of a once-scraggly triangle of land in West Savannah. It's a handsome space, and hundreds of residents turned out for the dedication.

"This was a painful episode in Savannah's history, but it is one that we must not forget," Mayor Otis Johnson said. "I'm proud to be here today as Mayor of Savannah."